

Editorial observations on

Helen Keller: MY RELIGION

C.A. HALL

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## EDITORIAL OBSERVATIONS.

AN event we have anticipated with some degree of eagerness for months has now transpired: Helen Keller's book, *MY RELIGION*, in which she gives such affectionate testimony to the spiritual value of the teachings of the New Church, is published and sent forth on a mission by which many thousands will be richly blessed. When the American delegate to our Conference last May, the Rev. Paul Sperry, was in our midst, he told us much about the forthcoming volume, and at his instigation arrangements were made for the publication of a British edition. So editions have appeared simultaneously in America and Britain. In America the publishers are Messrs. Doubleday, Page and Company, and in this country, Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton. Here, we are fortunate in having the volume sponsored by a firm with a very high reputation and with power to effect a very wide distribution. We may confidently predict that the publication of this volume will arouse a wide interest in the teachings of the Church among many who have previously known nothing about them, and among not a few who are well-acquainted with them a new interest will be stimulated. We shall be disappointed if at least one result of this book is not an approach to the doctrines from a new point of view. The price of the British edition is six shillings.

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It is commonly known that Helen Keller is a remarkable, if not phenomenal personality. She was born in

THAT they who are destitute of the understanding of truth shall then understand, is signified by the eyes of the blind being opened.

*Swedenborg, A.E. 239.*

1880. Before she was two years old, she lost her eyesight and hearing through an illness. She was rendered inarticulate. She says, "For nearly six years, I had no concepts whatever of nature or mind or death or God. I literally thought with my body. Without a single exception my memories of that time are tactual . . . there is not one spark of emotion or rational thought in these distinct, yet corporeal memories. I was like an unconscious clod of earth. Then, suddenly, I knew not how or where or when, my brain felt the impact of another mind, and I awoke to language, to knowledge of love, to the usual concepts of nature, of good and evil!" The story of how she slowly, painfully learned the names of things by touch, and learned to read, write and typewrite: of how she was admitted to Radcliffe College and gained knowledge of matters about which many who have all their senses are ignorant, is nothing short of a romance. It is a record which indicates a great genius, and it is a testimony to the tireless patience and ingenuity of her teacher and friend, Anne Mansfield Sullivan. From the time of her intellectual awakening, Helen Keller displayed an eager determination to know and understand. Her intellectual accomplishments by this time are a wonder: she is well-acquainted with science and philosophy, betrays wide classical knowledge and an appreciation of language which she can barely speak, of music, which she cannot hear, and of the beauties of nature, which she cannot see. She lives in a world that to her is invisible and soundless, but which she can describe with an accuracy seldom attained by those in possession of all their senses. America is rightly proud of her prodigious accomplishments and her name is known and honoured throughout the civilised world.

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After reading the remarkable book under review, MY RELIGION, we are led to ask, Who are the blind? Who are the deaf? Who are the dumb? Sightless Helen Keller "sees" as few of us see. Deaf Helen Keller hears as hardly any of us hear, and Helen Keller, dumb except for halting speech induced by training, and which to her is soundless, can express exquisite thoughts in language appropriate to them—in sentences displaying a winsome and significant artistry. We believe this is the sixth book she has written. One of her earlier volumes is entitled OPTIMISM, a title which in itself is a marvel when associated with the bodily disabilities of the author: another of her books is headed OUT OF THE DARK, indicating that the blind may see by a light that never was on sea or land. The present volume shows that Helen has found the light and that it is more real and precious to her than to many of us who think we see. Indeed, in a strict sense, as spiritual beings, we see only when we realise spiritual values, we hear only when we attend to the truth, and we speak only when we express the truth in life. How many who have hearing are alert to the dictates of conscience and the demands of righteousness? How many gifted with keen eyesight are quick to observe matters of value to eternal life and beauty of character? How many, ready in utterance, speak words that bless and heal? We fear it may be said of many of us, "This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed: lest at any time they

should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should be converted, and I should heal them." We cannot call Helen Keller blind when she has such glorious mental vision; deaf, when she is so attentive to the all-important things: or dumb, when she can write with such artistry and delicate feeling. Perhaps we are so mentally blind, deaf and dumb because we are too terribly preoccupied with outer sensations: and possibly Helen Keller has such clear mental vision, and is so capable of attending to and expressing spiritual truth, because her bodily disabilities prevent her from too keen an absorption in external things. Life always compensates, and in Helen's case the compensation is rich, indeed.

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But to us who believe that the illuminating teachings of the New Church are a good gift from the Lord, sent for the enlightenment and healing of humanity, the great interest in MY RELIGION must necessarily be the fact that it is this great woman's avowal of her whole-hearted and big-hearted acceptance of our faith, and, moreover, an exquisitely phrased and attractive presentation of the truth as she sees it. And let it be said that she sees it beautifully, poetically, and practically. Accustomed as we are to the dispassionate and Latinized terminology of Swedenborg, we are apt to think of his writings academically and scientifically. But the approach of Helen Keller is different: she detects the latent poetry, and it sets her heart rejoicing. The "doctrines" as she sets them forth are altogether winsome. In this book she betrays wide knowledge and understanding of Swedenborg, but she wisely devotes her attention to essential things. She ignores speculative matters and non-essentials which too often divert our attention from the main issues. She sees the teaching as a guide to life; not as a subject for fruitless argumentation. She has gripped the gist of Swedenborg and absorbed the spirit of his writings. A curmudgeon of a critic can parse and analyse the best of books and find flaws in it, and we might point to flaws in this entrancing volume. Every critic thinks himself the only orthodox person in existence! But in assessing the value of this book we have little use for criticism: we take it for what it is, one of the finest, if not the finest, and most attractive introductions to the teachings of the New Church we know of. The fact that it is written by a famous woman is a guarantee of its wide circulation, and the New Church is justly proud of a daughter in the faith who, in a delightful spirit of adventure, is determined to let the world know of the wonderful faith that is light in her darkness and sound to her deafness. We must do all we can to encourage the publishers. Christmas is coming very near, and what better present could we give to a thoughtful friend than Helen Keller's MY RELIGION? The Rev. Paul Sperry tells of arrangements in America to have the book produced in Braille for the benefit of the blind: similar arrangements should be made in this country.

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It is interesting to learn how Helen Keller became aware of the teachings of the New Church. Her spiritual god-father was John Hitz, one time Consul-General from Switzerland to America. When he was seventy he undertook to instruct the little blind-deaf girl of fourteen, and learned at that age the finger



alphabet and the Braille system of writing so that he could communicate with her without an interpreter. He used to rise every morning at four o'clock and devote the first fresh two hours of the day to transcribing into Braille passages from books which he thought would be helpful and delightful to her, especially books of philosophy and religion. He used to visit her at her home in Wrentham, Mass., every summer for six weeks at a time and they would take long walks every day and talk about this life and the next, and specially about Swedenborg and his disclosures about heaven and hell. Mr. Hitz did HEAVEN AND HELL in Braille and Helen says, "When, after reading HEAVEN AND HELL, I expressed a wish to know more of Swedenborg's writings, he laboriously compiled books of explanation and extracts to facilitate my reading. All this he accomplished in addition to his duties and his extensive correspondence. Many friends have done wonderful things for me, but nothing like Mr. Hitz's untiring effort to share with me the inner sunshine which filled his silent years." It should be added that Mr. Hitz became very deaf. Again she says, "He loved to take me out walking early in the morning while the dew lay upon grass and tree and the air was joyous with bird-songs. We wandered through still woods, fragrant meadows, past the picturesque stone walls of Wrentham, and always he brought me closer to the beauty and the deep meaning of Nature. As he talked the great world shone for me in the glory of immortality. He stimulated in me the love of Nature that is so precious a part of the music in my silence and the light in my darkness. It is sweet as I write to recall the flowers and the laughing brooks and the shining, balmy moments of stillness in which we had joy together. Each day I beheld through his eyes a new and charming landscape 'wrapped in exquisite showers' of fancy and spiritual beauty. We would often pause that I might feel the swaying of the trees, the bending of the flowers, and the waving of the corn, and he would say, 'The wind that puts all this life into Nature is a marvellous symbol of the spirit of God.'" Helen Keller will for ever be regarded as a wonderful New-Churchwoman, but in association with her memory we must enshrine Anne Mansfield Sullivan, her teacher, and the grand old gentleman, Mr. Hitz, who first drew her attention to the teachings of the New Church, and thus rendered a religious service for which humanity will learn to richly bless him.

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There is not a dull sentence in any part of MY RELIGION and in many places there are passages which rise to a great height of eloquence. The teaching, at times, is set out in commanding terms and with a vividness that brings out new meanings. Some statements are pregnantly aphoristic. Thus, in reference to regeneration, who but Helen Keller would think of talking of "The birth into existence and the birth into life?" Here is a text about which one could wax eloquent! Again, "The old thought tells us we are given earth to prepare for heaven, but there is truth the other way round. We are given a knowledge of heaven to fit us better for earth." Once more, "We cannot tell from the outside whether our experiences are really blessings or not. They are cups of poison, or cups of healthful life, according as to what we ourselves put into them." While we are moved by

the whole book, perhaps it is when the Authoress comes to deal with the religious life in its practical aspects in the closing sections of the book that we are most touched. Here she reaches the meaning of things and displays her own rich appreciation of spiritual values in application to mental attitude and outward conduct. She sees the Love which is at the heart of man and nature, and from which all things are produced, by which all things are maintained, not as a vague, late product of evolution, nor as empty sentiment and meaningless emotion, but as the very substance and life of things. She writes, "Life, with all its emotions, likes, dislikes, and interests, flows, is moulded, coloured, and ultimately its vicissitudes are controlled, by the immot love of man. He should strive to form the true concept of love as an active, creating, and dictating power if he wishes to acquire nobler feelings, finer ideals, and satisfy his so pathetic yearning for happiness. Love should not be viewed as a detached effect of the soul or an organ or a faculty or a function. It involves the whole body of conscious thought, intention, purpose, endeavour, motives, and impulses, often suppressed, but always latent, ready at any moment to embody itself in act. It takes on face, hands, and feet through the faculties and organs: it works and talks, and will not be checked by any external circumstance, when once it would move towards an objective."

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Helen Keller says, "The one principle to be remembered by all is that religion is to live a doctrine, not merely to believe one." She realises the vital distinction which Swedenborg makes between the life of piety and the life of charity. She writes about "delights" with remarkable insight. She says, "Swedenborg's sayings about delight and happiness seem as numberless as the flowers and leaves of a fruit tree in full bloom; and it is not surprising when he declares that the life of man is in the delight of what he loves. There is no interest where the heart is cold, and where there is no interest there is no delight. Human happiness is composed of countless small joys . . . but few people with all their senses stop to think of this, and still fewer sit down to count their blessings. If they did, they would be kept so busy that the next harsh call to duty would seem music to their enchanted ears. . . . It is not necessary, as is very often supposed, to give up natural pleasures before we gain spiritual ones. On the contrary, we enjoy them more exquisitely as we rise in the inner life." "This world is so full of care and sorrow that it is a gracious debt we owe to one another to discover the bright crystals of delight hidden in sombre circumstances and irksome tasks. Swedenborg, whose labours were a giant's, saw inexhaustible stores of joy in the midst of exacting routine." "Very few persons I meet realise this wealth of joy! It is a marvel and a sorrow to me how far afield they go in pursuit of happiness. They look for it in the strangest of places. They visit kings and queens and bow to them; they seek happiness in travel and excitement; they dig for it into the depths of the earth, thinking it lies in hidden treasure. Many others rob themselves of joy by superstitiously fettering their intellect for the sake of religion or convention or party policy. Most pitifully are they blinded, deafened, and starved when all the time there is within

them a world of sweet wealth ready to bless their hearts and minds. It is God's gift to them out of His Happiness, and they know it not."

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But any review of this remarkable book must necessarily be inadequate. To be appreciated it must be bought and read. We think it marks an epoch in the history of the New Church, and any neglect of it on our part would indicate a supineness which we cannot think exists among our readers. There are a few errors to which the attention of the publishers' reader should be drawn, and which should be corrected in the next edition, which will surely be called for. On page 48, "books" should read "brooks." On page 92, "Closed in invisibility" should surely read, "clothed in visibility." On page 99, for "He is definite and eternal" substitute "He is infinite and eternal." And on page 179, "where there is no impulse" should read, "where there is not interest." The get-up of the book is attractive, but the colour of the happily removable protecting sheet repels us.

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It will be observed that subscriptions in response to the Conference Appeal for £3000 are accumulating, and we have every confidence that the full amount asked for will be subscribed by the end of the financial year. The Treasurer of Conference, however, points out that the Conference account at the bank is heavily overdrawn, and that it would be a great advantage to the Conference, and save overdraft interest, if intending subscribers would send their donations as early as they can make it convenient.

CHARLES A. HALL.

### THE CONFERENCE APPEAL.

The following is a list of Subscriptions to the Conference Appeal for £3,000 received up to November 14th. Further Subscriptions are urgently needed and should be sent to Mr. Harold Pownall, Raventhorpe, Wilbraham Road, Manchester, S.W.

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Anonymous .....	10	0	0
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Mr. C. G. Ashworth.....	1	1	0
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### THE GARDEN OF EDEN.

BY HUBERT S. HUNTLEY.

"And Jehovah God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed."—GENESIS ii., 8.

In the writings, No. 98 A.C., are the following very definite and inclusive words:—"By garden is signified intelligence; by Eden, love; by the East, the Lord; consequently, by the garden in Eden eastward, is signified the intelligence of the celestial man, which flows in by love from the Lord."

To understand the full force and beauty of this explanation, it is not only essential to gather more from the writings, but to meditate well each expression. Let these words then from the *Arcana Celestia* supply us with four headings.

1.—"BY GARDEN IS SIGNIFIED INTELLIGENCE." The garden of Eden presents the idea of Heaven, for there the Lord "put the man whom he had formed." It is the home, the resting place of the formed or perfected man which the Lord, in his mercy, prepares for him, and finally places him in. It is described, here, as a garden, to represent the state of intelligence of the celestial or heavenly man. Even as a garden represents an orderly and beautiful grouping of trees and plants which, springing from the ground upwards, embrace the light and warmth of the sun, through which comes, mediately, their natural life; so the soul of the godly man is as a watered garden, wherein grow as trees and plants those perceptions of heavenly things, whereby he rejoices in the beams of the "Sun of Righteousness," is elevated into the light of celestial wisdom, and into the life-giving warmth of celestial love. Without this intelligence, the sweet harmonies of Heaven, its most beautiful paradisaical scenes and all its angelic beings; nay more, even the all-pervading sphere of a Father's love, could produce no echo of joy in the human heart. A soul without intelligence is as a stock void of all feeling. But how, it might be asked, are we to attain unto such intelligence? Surely, if this be needed, how hard, if not altogether impossible a thing it seems to become angelic! We cannot go to the angels to acquire their wisdom, and, in this world, we do but see as through a glass darkly. But read again this 8th verse, and you may see from whence cometh the intelligence. Who plants the Garden? "Jehovah God," it says. It is the Lord himself who implants in the hearts of the obedient this heavenly gift, so that each may become a little Heaven in himself, and thereby be fitted to inhabit and take his place in the heaven of angels.

Verily "The spirit of the Lord leadeth you into all truth." We cannot procure it by ourselves, but if we would receive it in intelligence, we must submit our ways unto the Lord entirely. The spirit cannot lead except we follow. But if we are striving to live in "the fear of the Lord" from day to day, these spiritual trees of Eden will find good ground in our hearts, and take root as in well-watered gardens. At first, it may seem to us that their growth is from ourselves, as though we by striving were making ourselves "wise unto salvation"; but, when at length the "old Adam" in us is subdued, and our whole manhood is in peaceful union with the Lord, because in perfect and loving submission to His will: then our eyes are opened, and we are able to perceive that as evil is overcome there is a constant influx of new life from the

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